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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 GEORGETOWN 001349

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/28/2015

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SUBJECT: TEIXEIRA STRUGGLING TO CONTROL HOME AFFAIRS
MINISTRY

REF: GEORGETOWN 1269

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael D. Thomas for reason 1.4(b) and (d)

1. (U) SUMMARY. Charge, Deputy Consul, and PolOff met with Minister of Home Affairs Gail Teixeira on December 23. Teixeira had requested a Consular briefing on trends in fake Guyanese civil documents detected by the Consular Section. Teixeira also described problems with control of the visa process in Guyana's foreign missions, including those in India, China, Israel, and Africa. Teixeira also discussed voter registration problems that continue to dog the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) (septel). END SUMMARY.

No Control Over Birth, Marriage Registrations

2. (C) Charge, Deputy Consul, and PolOff met with Minister Teixeira at the MHA on December 23. Teixeira had asked Ambassador last month to send a Consular Officer to brief her on fraudulent birth and marriage certificates issued by the General Register Office (GRO) that had been detected by the Consular Section. Teixeira was particularly worried that she is not getting full and accurate details on these incidents in the briefings GRO gives her. Deputy Consul described the problematic birth and marriage certificates submitted to the Consular Section in Immigrant Visa cases, which appear to have been genuinely issued using GRO paper and seals, but which were not obtained in accordance with Guyanese law. The clear implication is that GRO is issuing civil documents improperly.

3. (SBU) Birth certificates. In a common example, someone whose original birth certificate does not list a father is able to obtain a new certificate from GRO that includes the purported father's name. Teixeira confirmed this was not legal without the father at least going to court and accepting paternity.

4. (SBU) Marriages. Guyanese marriage certificates state whether the marriage is by license, by notice, or by banns. The latter two methods require both the bride and groom to be in Guyana for weeks before the marriage. In Guyana's widespread business marriages, the Guyanese-American petitioner will usually remain in the country less than a week and use an unscrupulous marriage officer to wed them and obtain a certificate. Teixeira confirmed these quick visit marriages are invalid if done by notice or banns.

5. (C) Minister Teixeira expressed what seemed to be genuine displeasure with these improperly or unlawfully issued civil documents involving GRO. She explained how she is already trying to fix the problem. She has confronted GRO about similar incidents but to date GRO has denied responsibility for the fraudulent documents. However, the evidence is too convincing now -- the paper stock, seal, and signatures of these certificates are all genuine. Regarding marriages, Teixeira has revoked the license of one marriage officer and is scrutinizing the entire marriage license process. She has also required the GRO to implement basic management controls over controlled items, such as locking up the seal when not in use and inventorying and securing supplies of blank certificates. She also asked Deputy Consul to keep her apprised on a monthly basis of problems encountered with GRO issued documents.

Trying to Control Who Comes In and Who Stays Out

6. (C) Teixeira mentioned several suspicious visa cases on her plate. She said this flow of people wanting to enter Guyana on unlikely pretenses could relate to trafficking in persons, the gold and diamond industries, arms smuggling, or terrorist links. She said she would like to work with USG to prevent these activities. She takes some files immediately to the Guyana Police Force's Special Branch for them to check Interpol databases or any other sources, since the Ministry has no computer resources to conduct such checks.

7. (C) Following up on the November 17 meeting's discussion of Indian tour operators (reftel), Teixeira said she is taking a hard line with tour operators applying for visas for

large groups of young, single, businessmen purportedly traveling to Guyana for tourism. Almost every set of applicants included an older man with an Indian passport issued at a location outside of India (such as Beirut or Frankfurt). Teixeira has compiled a case file with passport numbers for each of these tour group applicants. In early December, a new tour operator appeared requesting visas for another group of "tourists". Teixeira forwarded the operator's supposed e-mail address to the Indian High Commission, which determined the address was fictitious.

18. (C) Teixeira described a court case involving a group of Indians waylaid in Guyana before trying to enter the U.S. or Canada illegally. In what she said is a typical scam, their families probably paid human smugglers to take them to "America". After bringing the group to Guyana (in the "Americas") the smugglers then demand additional payments for onward transport to the U.S. or Canada. In the case at hand, one man escaped and went to the Indian High Commission. Three Indians are now in protective custody as witnesses but the authorities will not be able to keep them much longer. Teixeira does not know how these three entered Guyana. She admitted she is unsure what she is dealing with but this case is just the "tip of the iceberg".

19. (S) Teixeira described the steps she has taken to curtail irresponsible, or corrupt, consular operations at Guyana's diplomatic posts. She said she encountered "great resistance in foreign missions trying to tighten up on visa issuances" and lamented that the MFA and other ministries do not understand that visa officers overseas are an important part of the country's security apparatus. All diplomatic missions are supposed to send visa issuance reports to the MHA, but the Ministry receives them six weeks after the fact when the travelers have already either transited Guyana or have arrived and disappeared.

-- Teixeira said she has managed to bring Beijing visa operations under control. Guyana has ceased issuing visas for Chinese to join their families in Guyana, although Chinese are still granted visas to work in the timber and sugar industries (Note: China is financing a US\$100 million restructuring of Guyana's sugar industry. End note.) She said that a corrupt system operated in China involving the mission and the Ministry. Now, the mission in Beijing can only deal with bilateral cooperation and investment issues.

-- In response to Charge's question, Teixeira said the visa situation in India is "manageable". All visa applications from South India come to the MHA in Georgetown for adjudication, allowing for greater scrutiny. She believes South Indians who want a Guyanese visa would not travel all the way to New Delhi to apply in person at the High Commission there. In response to Charge's direct question about visa operations at Guyana's Embassy in New Delhi, Teixeira said "Delhi doesn't deal with us". When the conversation turned to Delhi, the normally animated Teixeira slowed down and spoke carefully and deliberately. She was noticeably less forthcoming about the situation in Delhi than about any other topic during the two and a half hour meeting. However, she did suggest twice that her relationship with the Delhi Embassy was dictated by orders from higher authority. (Note: Teixeira's predecessor as Minister of Home Affairs, Ronald Gajraj, was implicated in death squad activity and was forced to resign under pressure from the US and other donors after he admitted to consorting with and illegally granting gun licenses to known murders. Gajraj has now taken up appointment in New Delhi as Guyana's High Commissioner to India. End note.)

-- Teixeira said Guyana's embassy in Suriname and Guyana's honorary consuls (particularly in Africa and Israel) are now her biggest problems on the visa front.

110. (S) In Teixeira's words, Guyana does not have an immigration policy. There is little control over visa issuance. Immigration authorities cannot control or keep track of who enters the country. The government loses immigration cases in court. Deportation is expensive and often ineffective. In the past, all immigration decisions contained a note that refused applicants could appeal directly to the Minister, a practice Teixeira said she had abolished. Teixeira said disorder in the immigration process is embarrassing to the government and the GoG wants to do something about it. But President Jagdeo is also concerned about profiling travelers by race or nationality -- an image he does not want to project.

Corruption Interferes Constantly

111. (S) During the meeting, Teixeira acknowledged there "was quite a lot of corruption in the immigration division". She has tried to deal with it by firing many employees in the Ministry. However, she fears that these corrupt former employees will sell their knowledge of the system and ability to forge documents. For example, she said the former MHA

Security Policy Coordinator, Sultan Kassim, is "very closely linked to a number of networks, particularly the Chinese" and described a slush fund financed by Brazilian fees for work permits that Gajraj and Kassim had run. Unable to pin any direct evidence of illegal activity on Kassim, Teixeira said she had dealt with him by sending him on long-term leave.

¶12. (S) Teixeira stated that while corruption also existed in the police force and GRO, the corruption of justices and magistrates was the most worrying. She said all Guyanese know which cases, magistrates, and lawyers are tainted by corruption. As a result, the government cannot win important convictions. Similarly, she said everyone knows who the "drug lawyers" are, but the local bar association is too feeble to disbar anyone.

Still Uneasy about American Religious Groups and Airstrips

¶13. (C) Teixeira reiterated the concern she raised at the previous meeting about the Seventh Day Aviation medical group operating in Guyana. She said a different group now wants to build an airstrip in the Rupununi hinterland. This group has suddenly expanded from one priest with an aircraft in the late 1990s to a group of around 20 missionaries whose projects always involve airstrips. Teixeira emphasized the government's desire for fewer rural airstrips, given their link to narco-trafficking, and its policy of destroying some of them. She thinks these American religious groups are somehow taking advantage of the Amerindian villages that host them. However, besides referring to reports of drug drops at one location, she shared no evidence of possible sinister activity on the missionaries' part.

Request for Assistance

¶14. (U) Teixeira made two requests for assistance.

-- First, she would like to computerize the civil document process (all birth, marriage, and death certificates are now handwritten) and create scanned archival copies of all old records. She said two groups are submitting proposals to do this but she does not have the money to implement the project. Teixeira noted that this major project will have to wait until after the 2006 elections.

-- Second, Teixeira asked for assistance in auditing the GRO's internal control procedures and in training GRO personnel to better understand and manage the critical security component to their jobs. She would like such training to culminate in new standard operating procedures for GRO's activities.

Comment

¶15. (C) This meeting further confirmed that Teixeira genuinely wants to fight the corruption and inefficiency that have a crippling effect on her broad portfolio (including GRO, immigration, the attorney general and the courts, and the police force). Long-standing smuggling routes that transfer illegal migrants from India, Pakistan, and China through Guyana to the U.S. and Canada are ideal for exploitation by terrorists and others who would do us harm. Thus, it would be strongly in U.S. interest to find ways to assist Teixeira in vetting suspect visa applications and tightening control of civil documents.

¶16. (C) Unfortunately, although Teixeira criticizes her predecessor Gajraj's imperious, direct control over the Ministry's workings, she has only slightly loosened the reins of control herself. This may reflect her very valid concerns over both corruption and competence within the MHA, or the PPP's habit of centralized decision-making and micro-management. The fact that she involves herself personally in sensitive visa applications supports either hypothesis. Another possibility is that the position has overwhelmed her. Post rates Teixeira highly as an honest, forthright interlocutor. However, more than a few Guyanese insiders think of her as a lightweight better suited to her previous position as Minister of Youth, Culture, and Sport.

END COMMENT.

THOMAS